

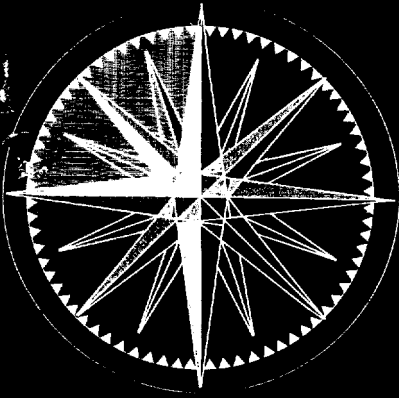
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SPECIAL REPORT

THE JORDAN WATERS ISSUE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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THE JORDAN WATERS ISSUE

Israel's Jordan River diversion project has been in routine operation for more than three months, and work is proceeding on expansion of the system's facilities. The Arab states, meanwhile, are in the preparatory stages of a countereffort which they hope will deprive Israel of much of the water it now seeks to utilize. While the Arab projects are technically feasible, the financial and political problems involved probably will indefinitely delay their implementation. Attitudes toward the Arab plans among the states directly involved range from Lebanon's reluctant acquiescence to Syria's militant determination.

Israeli Operations

Israel began testing its pumping facilities last May, and since midsummer has been operating the system continuously at about one fourth of its eventual capacity. Two pump complexes, housed in an underground chamber, are being used to raise water from below sea level at Lake Tiberias to a series of canals, tunnels, and conduits which carry the water southward to the Negev wasteland. A third pump complex is to become operative within two or three years. In the meantime, reservoirs and other facilities along the route to the Negev are being completed.

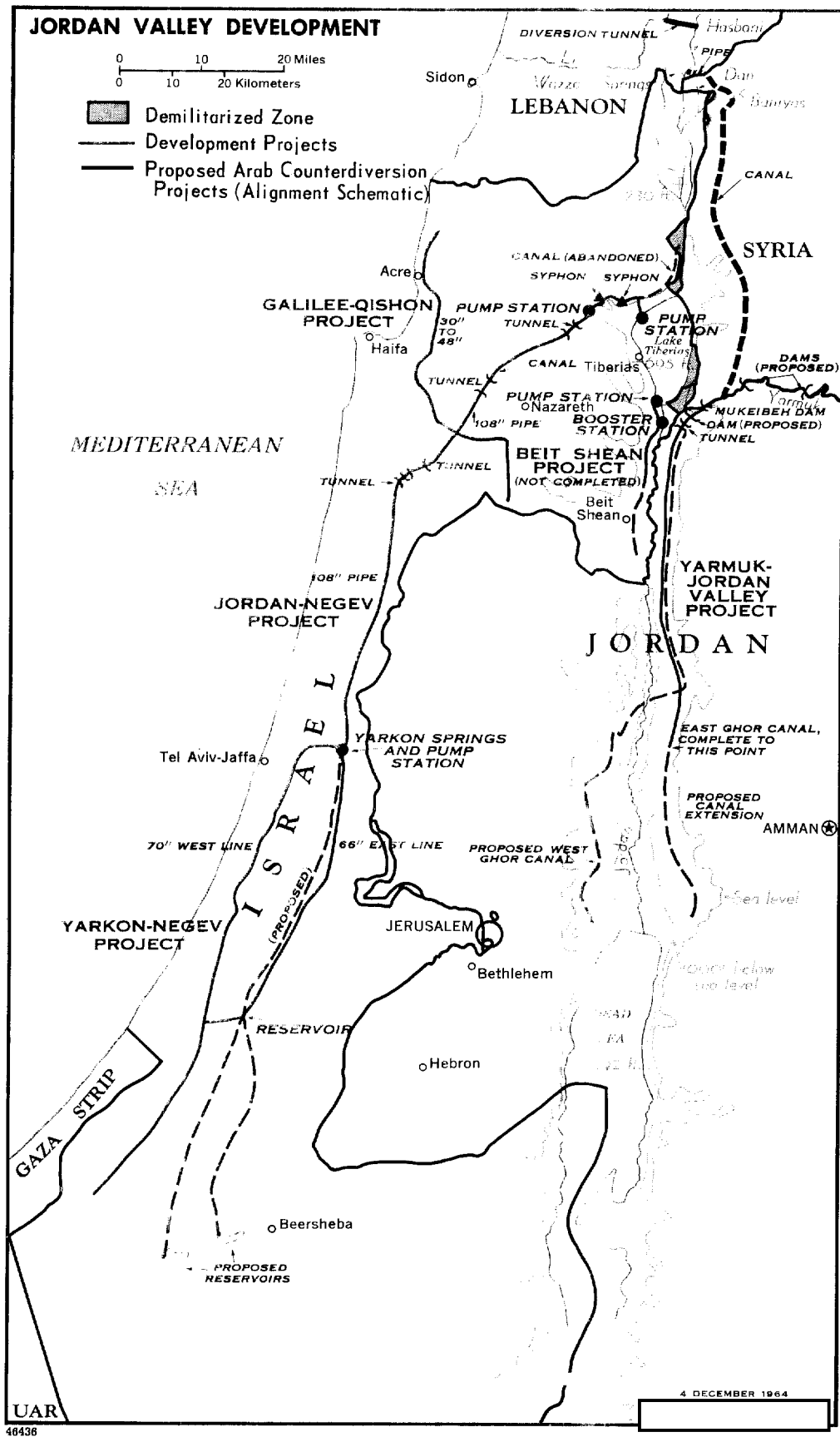
During the next three years, withdrawals will average 150 million cubic meters annually, according to Israeli authorities. Much of this amount will be used to replenish underground reserves depleted by the droughts of previous years. When the project reaches full capacity in

four years, the withdrawals will be at an annual rate of about 320 million cubic meters, and direct irrigation of the Negev will be the principal objective.

The water in Lake Tiberias, however, is becoming more saline, partly because of the current withdrawals, and one of the major problems the Israelis now face is to tap and divert the saline springs near the shore of the lake and at its bottom. Thus far, they have had little success in capping the springs in the lake, but they have succeeded in diverting the springs on the shore.

Israel is dumping highly saline water from these springs back into the river after it leaves the lake--a process which will make the waters of the lower Jordan virtually unusable for irrigation. Jordanian farmers, in particular, will be adversely affected. This will further embitter Israeli-Jordanian relations,

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even though the Jordanians too are contributing to the increasing salinity of the lower Jordan by withdrawing water from its Yarmuk tributary.

In an effort to reduce the salinity problem, the US [redacted] has suggested that Jordan install a pumping station just south of the lake which could divert the fresher water from the lake to Jordan's irrigation system. The Jordanians, while recognizing the logic of the proposal, rejected it

Arab Plans

The Arab plans involve the diversion of the headwaters of the Jordan River before they enter Israel. Under one project, water from the Baniyas River, which rises in Syria, is to be conveyed southward via a canal to the Yarmuk River, on the Syrian-Jordanian border. Along the way Syria will utilize some of the water for irrigation. On the Yarmuk, a dam is to be built at Mukheibeh for storage of the diverted water, and a tunnel is to take this

water to Jordan's East Ghor canal.

The Arab plans also envisage a two-way diversion of the Hasbani River, which rises in Lebanon. Water from the lower Hasbani is to be pumped to the Baniyas diversion canal. The upper Hasbani is to be diverted into Lebanon's Litani River by means of a dam and tunnel.

The Mukheibeh project was assigned first priority at the second Arab summit conference at Alexandria in September. A Yugoslav firm now is making engineering studies for the dam, which is designed to hold 200 million cubic meters of water. The Jordanians estimate that it will take four years to complete the structure. The cost of the dam and tunnel, estimated at \$28.7 million, is to be borne by the Arab League, with major contributions coming from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Syria has completed most of the studies and preparations for construction of the canal, which will traverse its territory and take an estimated two years to complete. Lebanon, however,

[redacted] is moving slowly in fulfilling its role in the plans. The Lebanese and the Syrians are at odds as to where the pumps for the lower Hasbani project should be located. Lebanon wants them to be installed in Syria, which would put virtually all of the canal diversion project in Syrian territory and would shift most of the

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THE JOHNSTON PLAN



25X1 US Ambassador Eric Johnston's 1955 plan for allocating the waters of the Jordan River basin stressed that all reasonable uses of the water within the basin itself must take precedence over those outside of it, such as Israel's plans for irrigating the Negev desert. Particular care was taken therefore to give Jordan, the principal riparian state, the largest allocation.

Jordan was to receive a total of 720 million cubic meters annually, including 377 million from the Yarmuk River, 100 million from the upper Jordan via Lake Tiberias, and 243 million from the wadis along the Jordan's east bank. Lebanon and Syria together were allocated 132 million cubic meters per year from the upper Jordan. Israel's share, estimated at an average of 320 million cubic meters annually, consisted of 25 million from the Yarmuk plus the residue of the upper Jordan waters after equitable Arab claims had been provided for.

The Israelis approved the Johnston Plan with only minor exceptions concerning international supervision and water allocations at certain points. The Arab technical representatives all recommended that their governments accept the plan, but the Arab League Political Committee failed to endorse it and in October 1955 returned it to the Arab Technical Committee for "further consideration."

responsibility for its defense to the Syrian Government. The issue is complicated by a border dispute in this area between the two countries. Thus far little appears to have been done with regard to the tunnel for diverting the upper portion of the Hasbani.

Impact of the Plans

Accurate figures are not available regarding the amount of water that presently flows into Lake Tiberias, the natural reservoir of the Jordan River from which the Israelis are making their withdrawals. The flow from the tributaries sometimes varies greatly from season to season, and some of the water in the lake comes from springs. Thus, it is difficult to determine what effect complete implementation of the Arab plans would have on Israel's project.

It does appear that, at the most, the flow into Tiberias could be reduced by somewhat more than half. This would leave a balance of only about two thirds of the amount Israel plans to take. The Israeli Government, in any event, has stated that it will oppose "unilateral and illegal measures" by the Arab states to divert the Jordan headwaters, and "will act for the preservation of Israel's vital rights."

The 1955 Johnston Plan for unified development of the Jordan River basin, although in effect rejected by the Arab states, still has some bearing on the waters dispute. The US, which proposed and negotiated the plan, considers the allocations (see inset) it made to be a useful yardstick for division of the Jordan waters, and accordingly has urged both the Israelis and the Arabs to abide by it at least tacitly.

Israel agreed to the Johnston proposals in 1955 and has since said that it will adhere to them, although the capacity of Israeli facilities eventually would permit withdrawals in excess of the plan's allocation to Israel.

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In anticipation of a possible hostile Israeli response to Arab efforts to divert the Jordan's headwaters, the first Arab summit conference in January 1964 decided to increase Arab military strength. The build-up is in progress through the medium of a United Arab Command dominated by Egypt. At the Alexandria conference in September, the Lebanese originally maintained that no counter-diversion construction should begin until complete military preparedness had been achieved. In the end, however, they accepted Nasir's "compromise" proposal that construction begin without delay but that actual

diversion be deferred until the military build-up is completed.

Sensitivity on both sides over the waters issue has already added to the chronic tension along the Israeli-Syrian border. The clash there on 13 November occurred in the area where the tributaries of the upper Jordan enter Israel. While the fighting had no direct relationship to the waters dispute, both Israeli officials and the report on the incident by the UN Truce Supervision Organization cited the importance of this area to Israel's water projects. Firing broke out again in this area on 1 December. Israel is likely to be increasingly tough about activity at this part of the frontier when and as the Arab diversion work progresses.



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